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ABSTRACT

Peer presentations are a common way of sharing experience and expertise. But while most teachers are comfortable and confident in a classroom environment, the task of presenting to their peers may be formidable, and one for which they are ill prepared. Giving a peer presentation can help a teacher build his/her professional reputation, develop skills in adult education, and even increase prospects for career advancement. This PEN digest provides practical guidance aimed at supporting teachers and others who have the task of presenting to an adult audience. The digest first highlights four ideas to help a presenter cater to an adult audience: (1) encourage autonomy; (2) encourage sharing of ideas and experiences; (3) encourage participation; and (4) support application. It also provides a table which considers the three main ways people receive information--visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The main part of the digest focuses on planning and designing a presentation for adults and gives specific tips on running a presentation. (NKA)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Designing learning experiences for peers

LISA VINCENT JENNY BARLTROP

In their own classrooms, teachers present information and create dynamic learning experiences on a daily basis. Yet the task of giving a presentation to their adult peers may cause even experienced teachers to experience fear and self-doubt. This PEN provides practical guidance aimed at supporting anyone who has the task of presenting to an adult audience.

Now, be honest. Have you ever:

- carefully avoided the principal's eye when she's asked for a volunteer to give a presentation at the next P&C meeting?
- spent half the time during a district workshop planning how you can make an early exit without looking too obvious?
- given a presentation off the cuff because you knew the subject inside out and didn't really think you needed to do any preparation?
- been to a staff training and development session where you've spent the entire time looking at the back of the presenter's head and a half-hidden overhead screen displaying a handwritten slide that you couldn't decipher?
- been to a presentation where you've been so engrossed in the fantastic backgrounds and animations in the slide show that you can't remember what the presentation was actually about?

Peer presentations are a common way of sharing experience and expertise. But while most teachers are comfortable and confident in a classroom environment, the task of presenting to their peers may be formidable, and one for which they are ill prepared.

Giving a peer presentation can help you build your professional reputation, develop your skills in adult education and even increase your prospects for career advancement. If you answered yes to any of the questions above, or if you'd simply like to improve your presentation skills, this paper is designed for you (and those of your colleagues whose presentations you've endured!). In it, we'll explore both theoretical and practical guidelines on peer presentation.

In particular, we'll look at:

- important considerations when planning adult learning
- how to plan and design an effective presentation
- how to run a presentation effectively.

Planning adult learning

So you've agreed to give a presentation. Naturally, you'd like it to hit the mark with your peers. Here are some ideas to help you cater for your adult audience.

1. Encourage autonomy

- Plan to involve your peers in the learning process. If you have the opportunity, ask them in advance what they'd like to learn from the presentation, so you can choose content that reflects their identified needs and interests.
- At the beginning of the session, allow your peers to identify the key issues on which they'd like to focus. Try to tailor the session to cater for these needs.
- Help equip your colleagues to continue the learning process after the session. Provide them with examples, references, websites and other resources to enable them to follow up their areas of interest.

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2. Encourage sharing of ideas and experiences

- Recognise that some of your colleagues may know as much (or even more) as you do about the topic. Welcome their input during the session, and recognise the value of their experiences. Look to your peers to add value to the content you bring to the session.
- Consider yourself to be a facilitator as well as a presenter. Plan to have times for discussion. Plan how you will manage these discussions to ensure that they are productive and relevant, and that they don't use up all your presentation time.
- If the goal of the session is to develop plans or resolve an issue, try to seek input from as many people as possible, so that everyone in the group feels they have contributed and can 'own' the outcome.

3. Encourage participation

- Use practical, everyday examples to demonstrate your points and enliven the session content.
- Plan scenarios, role-plays and group activities to apply the content.

4. Support application

- Provide your peers with practical suggestions about how they can put this learning into practice soon after leaving your session. Try to identify relevant resources that will enable this.
- If possible, allow some time at the end of the session to brainstorm ways you can implement the ideas in your school. Suggest or develop an implementation plan that includes specific action items and a schedule.

Adult learning styles

Just as you cater for a range of learning styles in the classroom, you need to consider the variety of learning styles displayed by your adult audience. In the classroom, there are plenty of opportunities to provide diverse activities that meet wide-ranging student needs. However, a peer presentation offers you only limited opportunities to provide the right balance of activities.

The following table will help you to cater for most of your audience by considering the three main ways that people receive information — visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

Cater for...	by...
Visual learners	• providing an overview of the presentation content • using slides, pictures, diagrams and/or samples to support your presentation • using a short video to present some of the content • writing up key words, concepts or ideas on a whiteboard • maximising eye contact, facial expressions and body language • making sure the area you use is tidy and free from visual distractions
Auditory learners	• including a spoken introduction, conclusion and debriefing activities • providing opportunities for auditory activities such as group discussions • making sure the room is quiet and free from noise distractions • being expressive with your voice
Kinesthetic learners	• planning scenarios, simulations, role-plays or practical exercises • handing out samples or resources to examine • providing paper and pens for note-taking • making sure no other activities are taking place in the room

If you wish to learn more about learning styles, try these references.

Gardner, H (1993) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Tenth anniversary edition. BasicBooks, New York.

McLoughlin, C (1999) 'The Implications of the Research Literature on Learning Styles for the Design of Instructional Material'. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology* 15 (3). **http://cleo.murdoch.edu.au/ajet/ajet15/mcloughlin.html**

Conner, M & Hodgins, W (2000). *Learning Styles*. **http://www.learnativity.com/learningstyles.html**

Planning and designing your presentation

Understanding your audience's learning needs

When you're asked to give a presentation, you'll often have limited preparation and delivery time. When you start planning, you'll be tempted to begin with the content. Your goal will be to try to get through the main points of your topic in the time you have. But think again. There's no point wasting your time covering information that your peers are likely to know. Nor is there any point focusing on issues that may be interesting but don't really meet their needs.

Your peers won't thank you if they allocate time in their busy schedule and then find that the time spent doesn't really do anything to help them in their day-to-day work. So even though it may take a little preparation, if you want your session to impress and help your colleagues, spend a bit of time up front considering their needs and prioritising the content accordingly.

If you get the chance, ask your peers beforehand what they'd really like to focus on. This could be done through informal conversation, a note in a pigeon-hole or an email. If you can't do that, at least spend a few minutes yourself considering these questions:

- What do my colleagues already know about the subject?
- What do they really need to learn about this topic?
- What don't they need to know?
- What are their current attitudes towards this issue?
- What are their most pressing problems?
- How are they going to use this learning?

Writing learning outcomes

After you've considered these questions, try to identify the most important learning outcomes for the session. You do this for your students, so why not apply the same principle for your peers? It's especially important to do this if you have limited preparation and delivery time. There's no point spending hours creating a lavish and fancy PowerPoint presentation about content your audience doesn't need to know.

Well-written outcomes will help you get straight to the most critical content. The more precise your learning outcomes, the more focused will be your content, and the more likely it will be that your session meets the needs of your colleagues.

Each outcome should be specific and demonstrable. If possible, also include the condition under which the attainment is to be demonstrated and the standard to be achieved. Verbs like *understand*, *know* or *learn* should be replaced with more specific verbs like *list*, *identify*, *describe*, *define*, *solve* and *operate*. Here are some examples.

Well written outcome	Poorly written outcome
By the end of the session, my colleague will be able to identify the relevant unit within the K–6 Drug Education Resource to use with their class.	In this session, my colleague will learn about the new edition of the K–6 Drug Education Resource.
By the end of the session, my peers will be able to choose the correct settings to copy and collate multiple copies of the school newsletter using the new staff photocopier.	By the end of this session, my peers will know about our new photocopier and how it works.

Analysing and organising the content

Well-written learning outcomes will, to some extent, help determine the specific content, and provide a sequence and structure for the content. If there are many outcomes, organise them into clusters and sequence the clusters in a way that will assist the learning. A proper sequence provides the learners with a pattern of relationships so that each activity will have a definite purpose. It also helps to avoid inconsistencies and duplication in the content of the instruction.

Here are some ways in which you could sequence your outcomes.

- Job performance order — sequence learning to replicate the job sequence.
- Simple to complex — sequence learning in order of complexity.

- Critical hierarchy — sequence learning in order of relative importance.
- Known to unknown — address familiar topics before unfamiliar ones.
- Dependent relationship — develop mastery over those concepts and skills first needed for mastery over others.
- Cause to effect — sequence learning from cause to effect.

There are many other researched and documented methods for analysing and organising your content. Here are some you may wish to learn more about.

Mind-mapping

A non-linear way of organising information that allows you to capture the natural flow of your ideas. To find out more, go to

http://www.thinksmart.com/mission/workout/mindmapping_intro.html

Information-mapping

A systematic approach to analysing, organising and presenting information based on audience needs and the purpose of the information. To see how this method works, go to

http://www.infomap.com/method/index.htm

Component display theory

CDT breaks down the content into different components or elements of instruction, and identifies methods for teaching each. The four types of content in component display theory are *facts, concepts, procedures* and *principles*. To find out more, go to

http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/learning/development.htm#Merrill

Concept-mapping

A concept map is similar to an outline or a flow chart, showing concepts and the relationships between them. For more information, go to

http://www.utc.edu/Teaching-Resource-Center/concepts.html

Developing a session plan

Once you've analysed and organised the sequence of your content, you need to develop a plan for the session, much as you would develop a lesson plan for a classroom activity.

Gagne is recognised as the foremost contributor to the systematic approach to instructional design and training. He created (1992) a nine-step process called the *events of instruction* as a tool to structure learning content.

While you may not have the luxury of building all these steps into your presentation, keeping them in mind as you plan the session will help your learners to focus, understand and process the content. You can use these events of instruction as a structure both for the presentation as a whole and/or its individual content chunks, or topics.

Gagne's nine events of instruction

1	Gain attention	Capture the attention of your audience so they are focused when you present the main content. Ask a thought-provoking question, tell a story or joke, present an interesting or provocative fact, or play a piece of music.
2	Inform learners of objectives	Tell your colleagues the learning outcomes you are addressing. This will help them to organise their minds around what they are about to see and hear.
3	Stimulate recall of prior learning	It will be easier for your peers to process information if they can hang the new ideas on a framework of personal experience. Ask questions about previous experiences, or build a case study based on a familiar situation.
4	Present content	Present your content to your audience. It will be chunked and organised meaningfully. Use a variety of media to appeal to different learning styles.
5	Provide learning guidance	Help your colleagues to process new information using examples, case studies, graphical representations and analogies.

6	Elicit performance	Allow your peers to apply the new concept. This provides them an opportunity to confirm their understanding and rehearse what they have learnt, ready to implement it on the job.
7	Provide feedback	Provide specific and immediate feedback to your peers about their performance. Don't just tell them they are doing well; explain exactly why they are doing well, and how they can improve.
8	Assess performance	Check that the content has been learned. In a peer presentation, you obviously won't do any structured assessing, but you may want to include some activities that enable you to check that your planned outcomes have been achieved.
9	Enhance retention and transfer to the job	Effective training has a performance focus, aiming to facilitate retention and transfer of concepts and skills. Consider creating or sourcing job aids, processes and resources that enable your peers to apply their learning back on the job.

To find out more about Gagne's events of instruction, try these references.

http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/learning/development.html#Gagne

Gagne, R M (1965) *The Conditions of Learning*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York.

Gagne, R M (1992) *Principles of Instructional Design*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York.

Preparing session resources and aids

To assist your delivery, you may decide to prepare your own handouts or visuals.

These can help you by:

- attracting and maintaining attention
- breaking diversion or distraction
- reinforcing key ideas
- illustrating a process, arrangement or concept that is difficult to describe
- adding realism and saving time
- keeping you organised and on track.

The ability to put together a professional-looking PowerPoint presentation is now almost a prerequisite for being a good presenter. Expectations are high if you choose to follow this path. (Go to **http://search.office.microsoft.com/assistance/product.aspx?p=Powerpoint** for some helpful PowerPoint articles and tips.) Remember: the goal of any visual material is to enhance your content — not to take over from you as the presenter. Presentation software is helpful in providing consistency and allowing you to spend your preparation time focusing on the content. However, be careful not to become too carried away with the vast array of backgrounds, styles, fonts and animations available.

Opposite are some design principles to help you achieve a simple but professional visual presentation.

Visual design principles

- Communicate one idea at a time.
- Keep the font size to 20 pt or more — take account of the screen size and room size.
- Use as few words as possible — use bulleted or numbered lists with no more than seven items per screen.
- Use contrasting colours for background and text. Use dark colours like blacks and dark blues for text. Keep red in graphics to a minimum, and never use it for text.
- Use photos, diagrams or charts to illustrate points and communicate concepts, particularly relational concepts.
- Develop a standard template to ensure consistency between slides — choose a standard font for body text, headings and captions.
- Avoid using capitals — IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING!
- Don't make slides too fancy, with elaborate backgrounds or distracting animations.
- Don't plan to display a large number of visuals.
- Make sure you complete a quality check of your visuals. Better still, ask a friend. (Everyone remembers mistakes.)

Running your presentation

Many teachers are confident and comfortable in front of a classroom full of children, but become weak at the knees when asked to present to their colleagues. They may feel their professional reputation is on the line, or fear being judged by their peers.

Try to remember that with all the thorough preparation you've done, you're bound to be right on track in providing what they're looking for. You have a lot to offer if you see this as an opportunity to share ideas and experiences and encourage your peers to add their own valuable insights. In many ways, you will have more credibility with your peers than an 'expert', precisely because they know you, and know that you understand their needs better than an outsider.

In this section, we'll consider some practical steps you can take to ensure your presentation runs smoothly, deal with tricky situations, and hopefully keep those nerves under control!

Presentation tips

Good preparation and planning will help you to be confident and less nervous when it comes to delivery. You are probably already quite skilled in this area. Nevertheless, here are a few reminders.

Be yourself

Try to be spontaneous. If possible, become familiar enough with your subject that you do not need to read notes. Remember how much you have to offer your peers from your own experience and knowledge, and make use of it. Never apologise when you deliver your presentation; apologising about how bad you are, or how you don't like giving presentations, is a big turn-off.

Rehearse

Try to practise your presentation before you deliver it. This will help you to become more familiar with the content, to identify any weaknesses and to check that you won't run over or under time.

Accept any nerves

It's normal to be a little nervous. First impressions count, so focus on the beginning of your presentation and perhaps try to learn it by heart. Speak slowly and calmly. After a few moments, you will relax and gain confidence.

Build rapport

Try to build a warm and friendly atmosphere. If you are enthusiastic, your audience will be interested and receptive. Establish eye contact with each person in the room so that they feel you are speaking to them directly. This will also give you the chance to notice signs of boredom or disagreement so you can modify your presentation if required.

Watch your body language

Remember that what you do not say is as important as what you do say. Your body language reveals a lot about what you think about the topic. Any repetitive or irritating gestures can distract your listeners from your message.

Practical preparations: A checklist

As a teacher, you will be well aware of the need to set up your room, equipment and resources so that you can avoid unforeseen problems and focus fully on the content. Failing equipment or hard-to-find resources can be distractions that put a dampener on your confidence.

Use the following checklist to help you be well prepared for your session.

- Have you prepared and tested your session plan?
- Have you created and checked your visual aids?
- Do you have a back-up hard copy of visual aids in case the equipment fails?
- Do you have enough copies of handouts and resources?
- Have you rehearsed the session?
- Have you checked that the venue has the equipment you need to deliver the session?
- Have you checked that the equipment works, that you know how to use it and that your visuals appear correctly on it? Check beforehand that the visuals fill the screen.
- Have you checked the room set-up and the placement of your equipment so everyone can see all visuals clearly? Test this by sitting in various seats before you begin.
- Have you checked every piece of equipment you need your participants to use? Don't assume that all four of the PCs will work if you've only checked three of them!

Be aware of your voice

Make sure your audience can hear you clearly throughout your presentation. Perhaps arrange for a friend at the back to signal if you can't be heard clearly. Remember to speak a little louder if you must turn away towards the whiteboard. Try to vary your voice to make it more interesting for your audience.

Use visual aids

Allow enough time to display visuals: remember, your colleagues have never seen them before. Stand close to the visual and indicate each point you want your peers to consider. Make sure you don't obstruct anyone's view of the screen. Turn off the visual if you've stopped referring to it — leaving it up can distract your audience's attention from what you are saying next. If you've prepared a handout, wait until the end of the presentation to distribute it, otherwise it could become a distraction.

Finish on time

It's important to be in control of how your session ends. If the bell rings first, your audience will be distracted, you'll be rushed, you may not be able to finish what you need to say and your conclusion will be ruined. If you happen to finish early, your colleagues will be happy anyway.

Handling difficult situations

Even the best presenter needs strategies for dealing with tricky situations. Here are some ideas.

Managing a well informed audience

- Don't panic.
- Be well prepared – have a thorough understanding of the content.
- Don't feel like you need to know everything.
- Draw on the expertise of your peers – encourage their participation and demonstration of their expertise.
- Before the session, try to find out if there will be anyone who has particular expertise in your topic. You could even try to enlist their support.
- Plan for activities that allow your informed colleagues to think through the application of the content or have their ideas challenged.

Responding to difficult questions

- Don't panic – you don't need to have all the answers.
- Maintain your integrity and acknowledge when you do not know the answer. Don't try to bluff. Ask whether there is anyone else in the group who knows the answer.
- Have a list of relevant websites and references ready so that people can find out more.
- If all else fails, suggest that the questioner research the answer and report back to the group at a later time. This will ensure the questioner really does want an answer, and will also discourage him/her or anyone else from asking questions just to be difficult.

Managing digression

- Make sure you know where you want to be going with the session, so you can easily assess the value of the digression.
- If the digression adds no value or detracts, stop it early before too much time is wasted.
- Be honest and explain that this line of discussion won't achieve the goals of the session, and that you can be available to discuss it at another time.

Managing diverse or conflicting opinions

- Respect each person's opinion. Encourage diversity and recognise that it adds value.
- Avoid becoming personal. Keep the discussion at a professional level and don't judge people by what they say.
- Try to prevent the formation of polarities within the group by encouraging a range of viewpoints.
- If you know in advance that there may be antagonism towards your message, try to identify at least one other person who can support you. Think about the seating arrangements and make sure that groups with opposite opinions don't sit on opposite sides of the room. You want to avoid a 'them and us' mentality.
- Try to establish some common ground from which you can work together to find a way forward. You can do this by asking some basic questions you are sure everyone will agree upon.
- Don't feel guilty. Remember it's not your responsibility to solve group negativity single-handedly.
- If all else fails, defuse the situation by putting the discussion on hold and moving to the next topic.

Learning from the experience

After the session, take some time to evaluate how it went. If a friend you trust attended the session, ask them to give you some feedback.

Some things to think about:

- What went well?
- What things didn't work?
- Did the session go according to schedule? Why or why not?
- Did you and your colleagues make some good decisions during the session?
- Look back a few weeks later and evaluate whether the session had any impact on the way you and your colleagues do things.

Finally...

So, be honest. After your presentation, wouldn't you just love to overhear your peers saying:

- "Well, that was worth staying back l ·e for!"
- "Those ideas were so relevant and practical — I'm going to use some of them with my Year Threes."
- "Finally, something useful for a change. I didn't know Jo was so good at giving presentations!"

With good preparation and a little practice, these kinds of comments could come your way. Just give it a go! The more presentations you give, the more confident you'll become, and the better you'll get.

Thanks

Thanks to the following teachers who provided us with context and insight:

Ronelle Ford *Teacher*

Peter Lee *Deputy Principal*

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Jenny Barltrop and Lisa Vincent are directors and principal consultants of savv-e, an e-learning design and production company. Between them, they have over 20 years' experience in instructional design for adult workplace learning.

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